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ABSTRACT

Results of an attitude survey of 39 selected Black community leaders in South Carolina toward South Carolina's Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) and the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (CSAB) are presented. Of the 39 returned questionnaires, 10 were from public school educators, 7 were from school board members, and 13 were from officers of local NAACP branches. The respondents had a fairly good understanding of the name of the test, when it was administered, and its purpose. However, only half of those surveyed knew that a score below 88 on the CSAB constituted identifying a child as "not ready" for first grade. One-third of those surveyed were not aware that: (1) the BSAP requires each school to inform the parents, in writing, if their child has been identified as "not ready"; and (2) the parents of a "not ready" child must receive an explanation of their child's skill deficiencies, as well as suggestions about how they can help their child overcome those deficiencies. Concerns of respondents included the possibility for greater grouping/tracking, and teachers' possible emphasis on teaching only the basic skills to be tested. (RL)

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Report On

Thirty-Nine South Carolina Black Community Leaders' Knowledge/Opinions of the COGNITIVE SKILLS ASSESSMENT BATTERY

By

Hayes Mizell/Betzi McCurley

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September, 1980

Southeastern Public Education Program
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During August, 1980, questionnaires were distributed to selected Black community leaders in South Carolina. The questionnaires assessed the respondents' understanding of South Carolina's Basic Skills Assessment Program (BSAP) and the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery (CSAB). There was no attempt for this to be a scientific or methodologically correct survey. The purpose of the survey was to receive feedback from persons one would expect to be knowledgeable about the BSAP and CSAB. This report is a summary of the findings. Of the 39 returned questionnaires, ten were from public school educators (teachers and administrators), seven were from school board members including one board member of a day care center, and 13 were returned by officers of local NAACP branches.

The respondents, on the whole, had a fairly good understanding of the name of the test, when it was administered, and the purpose of the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery. However, only half of those surveyed knew that a score below 88 constituted identifying a child as "not ready."

The Basic Skills Assessment Act requires each school to inform the parents, in writing, if their child has been identified as "not ready" based on the CSAB test results. Of the persons surveyed, one-third were not aware of this requirement. Additionally, one-third of the respondents were not aware that under law the parents of a child identified as "not ready" must receive an explanation of their child's skill deficiencies as well as suggestions about how they, as parents, can help their child overcome his/her deficiencies. Furthermore, South Carolina

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law requires schools to provide "appropiate developmental activities" for children identified as "not ready." Barely half of those surveyed felt that the schools were following this requirement of the law.

In response to the question about the method by which local schools provide first grade students with "appropiate developmental activities", 15% of the respondents knew of children assigned to special classes, 12% knew of children to whom assistance was being given within the regular classroom, and 10% knew of children who were pulled out of their regular class for part of the school day/week to receive special instruction. These percentages, however, are questionable given that almost half of those surveyed did not know what developmental activities were available in their schools for children identified as "not ready." Regardless of the intention of the law, 21% of our respondents said they knew children who had scored below 88 at the beginning of the 1979-1980 school year who were not promoted to the second grade even after they had been provided "appropiate developmental activities" during their first year in school. When the respondents were asked whether the schools were being monitored by the State Department of Education to evaluate the instructional methods, two-thirds of the sample responded that they did not know.

Half of those surveyed expressed some serious concerns about the implementation of the Basic Skills Assessment Act. For the purpose of summarizing their concerns, all commments were grouped into two general categories: student concerns and

administrative concerns.

Our respondents were most sensitive to the possible consequences for students taking the test. The possibility for greater grouping/tracking was one such concern. Additionally, it was felt that teachers might become oriented towards teaching only the basic skills to be tested. Questions were raised about children's awareness of the seriousness and impact of the test.

Objectivity and fairness were by far the greatest administrative concerns. One important issue raised was the lack of test taking experience of some children; therefore, the validity of the assessment results was considered questionable. One Head Start teacher pointed out that children who had not participated in a pre-school program would not perform as well on a test given during the first two weeks of school, as opposed to a child with some pre-school experience. Several concerns were raised by the respondents regarding test use. Would results be ignored rather than used on the students' behalf? Would correct interpretations be made by teachers, principals, and guidance counselors? What would be the actual utility of the test results? A majority of the respondents wondered whether there would be adequate follow-up and whether parents and the community would be involved in schools' use of the test results.

Respondents were also asked to report comments and opinions they had heard expressed by public school teachers and administrators in their communities. Foremost was the

concern of continued grouping/tracking as a result of the assessment. It was also feared that the curriculum would be limited only to those areas tested. The administrative concerns were directed towards the shortage of good teachers as well as the lack of sufficient classrooms resulting in classes being too large. Our respondents noted the frustration of school personnel by reporting that teachers and administrators felt that there was not full implementation of the Act as well as insufficient follow-up.

The community leaders were also asked what policies or practices relating to the public schools were of the most concern to them. Discipline and the need for more guidance programs with quality personnel--especially at the elementary school level--were most frequently cited as concerns. The existence of tracking systems was a prevalent concern as well as the desire for strengthening instructional methods in general and language arts in particular. A wide variety of other concerns were reported, perhaps reflecting both local problems and personal experiences.

While few general conclusions can be drawn from this survey it does appear that greater efforts need to be made to inform leaders in local communities as to the purpose and use of the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery. At the same time, the opinions and perceptions identified in this survey should not be ignored. The CSAB may, in fact, be used inappropriately in some local schools and the consequences may be harmful to the educational interests of children who are the intended beneficiaries of the Basic Skills Assessment

Act. It would seem to be imperative that citizens actively concerned about public education in their communities should find out how their schools are providing "appropriate developmental activities" to children who score below 88 on the CSAB, and what the effects of those efforts may be.

The Basic Skills Assessment Act represents a promise to the parents and children of South Carolina that the developmental and basic skill deficiencies of school children will be identified and remedied. If that is to occur then local citizens must be informed and vigilent, and public officials must take the iniatives necessary to ensure the promise is kept.

Questionnaire

on

The Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery

(By completing and returning this questionnaire you will help us assess how well your schools are doing in promoting public understanding of the state's Basic Skills Assessment Program, and how they are implementing this program in its initial stage.)

1. Are you aware that within the first two weeks of school all first grade children in your community are administered a readiness test called the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery? 34 Yes 3 No 2 *

2. Are you aware of the purpose of the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery? 31 Yes 7 No 1

3. Do you know that children who score below 88 on the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery are considered "not ready" for first grade work? 19 Yes 19 No 1

4. Do you know that South Carolina law requires schools to contact parents in writing to let them know their child has been identified as "not ready" for first grade work? 25 Yes 13 No 1

5. Do you know that South Carolina law requires schools to explain to parents of children identified as "not ready" how their children are deficient, and to suggest to the parents ways they can help their children overcome the deficiencies? 26 Yes 12 No 1

6. Schools are also required by law to provide "appropriate developmental activities" to children who score below 88 on the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery; do you feel confident this is being done in your schools? 19 Yes 17 No 3

7. Are children in your community who score below 88 provided "appropriate developmental activities" by: (check one)

   5 being given special assistance within the context of the regular classroom instruction?

   6 being assigned to a special class for children identified as "not ready"?

   4 being pulled out of the regular class for part of the school day/week to receive special instruction?

   2 being placed in a small group within the regular classroom and receiving special attention for part of the school day/week?

   2 other: (explain)

   Sent to resource teacher for special attention.
   All of the above.

   18 I don't know.

   No response 2

8. Do you know of any children in your community who scored below 88 at the beginning of the 1979-1980 school year and who, at the end of the year, were not promoted to the second grade?

8 Yes 25 No 6

9. The law requires the State Department of Education to "monitor and evaluate the curriculum and instruction methods in each school to ensure compliance with" the Basic Skills Assessment Act. Is this being done in your area?

9 Yes
2 No
25 Don't know
3 No response

*No response or "I don't know" (except questions #7 and #9).

10. The Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery is just the first test to be administered statewide as a result of the S.C. Basic Skills Assessment Act. By the 1981-82 school year basic skills tests will also be given in grades 1, 2, 3, 6, and 8. Do you have any general concerns about the implementation of the Basic Skills Assessment Act? If so, please state them below:

No Response: 20
Responded: 19

Student concerns: 6
Administrative concerns: 10
No concerns voiced: 7
Not knowledgeable: 1

Student concerns:
a) No consideration for children who were in a pre-school program;
b) Children not advised that CSAB is a test;
c) Not every child tests well, therefore, skills are not testable;
d) Tests will produce grouping/tracking;
e) Teachers will only end up teaching basic skills;
f) Results may not be used in behalf of students, rather they will be ignored.

Administration concerns:
a) Objectivity/fairness;
b) Testing within the first two weeks of school;
c) Usefulness of results;
d) Existence of follow-up:
   1) Will there be one?
   2) Will it involve parents/community?
e) Correct interpretation of results by teachers, principals, and guidance counselors.

11. Have you heard any teachers or administrators in your community express any concerns about the implementation of the Basic Skills Assessment Act, or the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery? If so, what are those concerns?

No Response: 14
Responded: 25

Student concerns: 4
Administrative concerns: 8
No concerns voiced: 13

Student concerns:
a) Cirriculum limited to the test;
b) Will produce grouping/tracking.

Administration concerns:
a) Shortage of good teachers;
b) Classes are too large;
c) Not enough classrooms;
d) Test is time consuming;
e) There is not full implementation of the Act nor is there sufficient follow-up.

12. Would you be willing, with our assistance, to inquire further into the administration of the CSAB in your school district?

28 Yes 4 No 7 No Response

13. What policies/practices of your local public schools are of most concern to you?

No Response: 18
Responded: 21

Policies: 11
Administration: 9
Minority Issues: 4
Parent Involvement: 3

Policies:
a) Discipline;
b) Instructional methods are weak;
c) Need for language arts & more basic skills;
d) Tracking systems;
e) More quidance programs with quality personnel, especially at the elementary school level.

Administration:
a) All phases of the building programs, or lack thereof;
b) Quality of administrators;
c) Seperation of school board from county in order to adequately finance school budget;
d) Updating school board policies;
e) Teachers-quality, load & planning time;
f) Title I;
g) Lack of communication with other educational programs.

Minority Issues:
a) Bias towards Black and poor children;
b) Stereotyping of Black & poor children's learning abilities;
c) Low level of non-white professional personnel.

Parent Involvement:
a) Lack of involvement at planning and implementation levels;
b) Infrequency of parent-teacher meetings.

14. What issues in public education do you believe need greater attention by parents and citizens in the community?

No Response: 16
Responded: 23

Parent: 13
School: 11
Financial: 4
Other: 5

Parent:
a) Need to spend more time with children;
b) Need to set models for the behavior of their children;
c) Need to apply more home discipline;
d) Community and parents need to work together as partners in total school program.

School:
a) Basic skills/ Quality education;
b) Transportation;
c) Teachers-quality with community involvement;
d) Tutoring programs;
e) Better parent-teacher relationships.

Financial:
a) Building programs;
b) Need more money;
c) Need better equalization of funds.

Other:
a) Cooperation;
b) Communication;
c) Better education as related to home, school, community;
d) Policy formation;
e) County officials need to be more concerned about education.

HANDOUTS

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USE IN COMMUNITIES

IS YOUR CHILD "READY" TO DO FIRST GRADE WORK?

WHAT THE SOUTH CAROLINA BASIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT ACT MEANS

The South Carolina Basic Skills Assessment Act was passed by the state legislature in 1978. It is an effort to make sure that schools really teach -- and that children really learn -- reading, writing and mathematics. Students need these basic skills to do well in school, and when they get out of school.

The law is also designed to make sure that children entering the first grade get the help they need if they are found to be "not ready" to do first grade work. The legislature was concerned that children who fall behind early in school often never catch up. The law requires each child entering the first grade to take a "readiness" test called the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE "READY" ?

When children enter the first grade, the school system wants them to know how to do certain things. If the children know how to do these things, it is more likely that the children will learn what they are taught. The Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery -- or "readiness test" -- is used by the school system to see if children entering the first grade have the skills they need to be ready for first grade instruc-instruction.

Children are considered "ready" for the first grade if they can:

- skip, jump and land on both feet, march, and bounce, throw, catch, and kick a ball (these are called 'gross motor skills').
- count from one to ten by memory, repeat nursery rhymes or songs, repeat sounds made by animals, objects, and people (this is called 'remembering auditory stimuli').

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- name the days of the week, basic colors, parts of the body, the seasons, letters of the alphabet, and so forth (this is called 'using expressive language').

- sort objects on the basis of color, select the picture that is different, sort objects on the basis of shape, and assemble simple puzzles (this is called 'determining likeness and difference in visual stimuli').

There are many other things schools would like for children to be able to do when they enter the first grade. In fact, the State Department of Education has developed a list of 18 broad skill areas -- called "readiness skills" -- that local school districts use to determine if children entering the first grade are "ready." The Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery is used by each district to find out if children have these skills.

MANY CHILDREN ARE NOT "READY" WHEN THEY ENTER 1st GRADE

Many children in South Carolina do not have the readiness skills they need when they enter the first grade. Last year, nearly 10,000 children who entered the first grade were found to be "not ready" based on the standards set by the State. Even children who were able to pass the readiness test and were classified as "ready" may not have been able to perform adequately in all the skill areas tested.

SCHOOLS MUST PROVIDE "NOT READY" CHILDREN WITH "APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES."

The South Carolina law says that if the school system finds that an entering first grader is "not ready" for first grade work, the teacher must provide the child with "appropriate developmental activities." This means the teacher has to make a special effort to teach the child the skills he or she is lacking. The Rainbow Book published by the State Department of Education suggests ways teachers can provide the activities required by law. Your child's teacher should have this book. THERE IS NO EXCUSE FOR A FIRST GRADE TEACHER NOT PROVIDING A "NOT READY" CHILD WITH THE "APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES" REQUIRED BY LAW.

If you have questions or concerns about readiness testing and your child, you can can contact us: Southeastern Public Education Program, P.O. Box 11592, Columbia, S.C. 29211. 252-0975.

IF

YOU ARE THE PARENT OF A FIRST GRADE CHILD

YOU AND YOUR CHILD HAVE RIGHTS

UNDER

THE SOUTH CAROLINA BASIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT ACT

A South Carolina law requires your child to take a test when he or she enters the first grade. The name of this test is the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery. The purpose of this test is to help teachers find out if your child is "ready" to do first grade work.

If your child scores above 88 on the test your child is considered "ready" to do first grade work. It is possible for your child to score as high as 117 on the test.

But if your child scores BELOW 88 on the test, the school will consider your child "not ready" for first grade work. The law says the school must help your child. The school must provide your child with "appropriate developmental activities" to help him or her get ready for first grade work.

If your child has been found to be "not ready" for first grade work:

TURN OVER TO FIND OUT ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS. . .

If you have questions or concerns about readiness testing and your child, you can contact us: Southeastern Public Education Program, P.O. Box 11592, Columbia, South Carolina 29211. 252-0975

THE RIGHTS OF PARENTS OF "NOT READY" CHILDREN

YOU HAVE A RIGHT to be informed, in writing, by the school within 15 days after your child has taken the test if your child was found to be "not ready."

YOU HAVE A RIGHT to request the school provide you with written information about your child's test results.

YOU HAVE A RIGHT to expect, whether or not you request written information about test results, that the school will provide you with specific information about the test and how your child performed on it.

YOU HAVE A RIGHT to expect that the school will explain to you the "deficiencies" your child may have that were identified by the test.

YOU HAVE A RIGHT to expect that the school will suggest how you can work with your child at home to help him or her overcome the "deficiencies" identified by the test.

YOU HAVE A RIGHT to expect that your child's teacher will provide your child with "appropriate developmental activities" to help him or her overcome the "deficiencies" identified by the test.

HOW TO MAKE SURE YOUR "NOT READY" CHILD BENEFITS FROM THE SOUTH CAROLINA BASIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT ACT

Has your child taken a test called the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery, sometimes referred to simply as the "Readiness Test"? Was he or she found to be "not ready" to begin regular first grade work? If so, the South Carolina Basic Skills Assessment Act requires your child's school to provide the special help needed to get your child ready to do first grade work.

It is up to you to make sure your child gets the special help which the law says the school must provide your child. To make sure that your rights and the rights of your child under this law are protected, it is necessary for you to:

1. Request from the school all written information regarding the results of your child's performance on the test, the Cognitive Skills Assessment Battery.
2. Schedule a conference with your child's teacher.
3. Find out from your child's teacher the specific "deficiencies" -- which were identified when your child took the test -- that are preventing your child from being ready to begin first grade work.
4. Find out from your child's teacher exactly what kind of help your child will receive. The law says the teacher will provide "appropriate developmental activities." Ask for specific examples of the activities being provided.
5. Find out from your child's teacher whether your child will be placed in a regular first grade class.

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6. Find out from your child's teacher whether your child will be provided the "appropriate developmental activities" in:

   - a regular first grade classroom?
   - a special class or resource room for part of the school day? How long?
   - a special class, separate from the regular first grade class, for the entire school day?

7. Find out from your child's teacher approximately how long the teacher thinks it will take your child to acquire the skills necessary to be ready to begin first grade work.

8. If your child is placed in a separate class for the entire school day because he or she is "unready", find out how your child will be given the opportunity to begin regular first grade instruction when he or she is "ready."

9. Find out from your child's teacher how you can help your child improve his or her readiness skills at home. Ask for specific suggestions or materials you can use to help. Your child's teacher should have special books prepared by the State Department of Education for this purpose.

10. Before you leave, schedule another conference with your child's teacher. This should take place within three weeks.

11. Tell your child's teacher that you expect to be kept informed about your child's progress in school. Say you would like to be called or sent notes telling you about your child's progress.

If you have questions or concerns about readiness testing and your child, you can contact us: Southeastern Public Education Program, P.O. Box 11592, Columbia, S.C. 29211. 252-0975